University of Alberta

THE CURE FOR MUSES

this time in pieces

by

Christie Schultz ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

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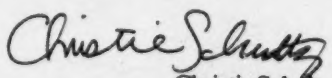

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE CURE FOR MUSES *this time in pieces* submitted by Christie Schultz in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts.

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19 December 2001

for my twin muses
who appear best when i can't see them

and to whom this may concern

dedication

Abstract

THE CURE FOR MUSES *this time in pieces* is, broadly, a consideration of the relationship between one's life, one's experience, and what Adriana Cavarero terms "the necessary other"—the "you" who makes possible a narratable subject. This consideration is complicated by active reflection upon the narrative of time and the time of narration. In this way, an understanding is proposed of the construction of subjectivity that is mediated by others, by narratable experience, by time, and by the process by which these are measured and recorded. Chapter one presents an ordered set of "pieces" that function as observations. Chapter two marks the possibility of edited narrative as a metaphor for difficulties faced as one constructs a subjectivity for, because of, and vis-à-vis others. Chapters three and four present the revelations of disorder that come out of order and silence. While still demonstrating a narrativized interest in experience and time, chapters three and four also make the writing itself a focus, one that problematizes the presumed necessity of "story-telling" as life-narrative.

Garrett:

Thank you for leaving the academy forever many times. For all the years of support and encouragement, I am grateful.

Cecile:

You are so much of me. I am, perhaps, so much of you. It's in the everything and the everyday that I am so ecstatically thrilled to be your daughter.

Kurtis:

From one to another. Let's keep going.

Julie, Cressida:

Thank you for reading and for the questions.

The English Department, University of Alberta:

Everyone I've worked with has made this experience quite fabulous. So many have meant so much. Thank you.

The muses:

I'll tell you who you are if you don't already know. But, I won't insist.

acknowledgements

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prologue

There was a tale that once was to be told, and told only once. This time, it was not a fairy tale, but oh how I wished it were. A simple story, or not a story at all, that forgot to invite the star-crossed lovers. One that brought only foes, or brought about only foes. (It is too early to tell.)

I will bring you, then, with me. Because you are asking, not begging. Begin.

1. Prepare yourself a drink. Be it wine or something stronger.
2. Remember your mathematics. (I want to leave the counting to you.)
3. Remember the curves of time, the curves of space. Remember my curves, if you like.

These are my elixirs. I bring with me only a few. This is only a short trip, and I would like so much to prevent injury. (I'll ask you to carry the heavy stuff.)

Take with you a guide because the process is not matter, does not matter, is not the material. Forgive me for offering relative measurement. I know this is not an exact science. And I'll confess: I like the guilt.

I leave you only with fictions because there are none. Nothing comes from nothing, my love. We all knew that long ago. We knew that all along. And yet we still enjoy the quotation because therein we witness the matter.

You leave me with only sweetness, mathematics, biology, and physics. Perhaps you were right all along.

I begin only with brief observations. Silence will follow.

Until I meet my match, you can be my lover. Until you meet my match, I might be yours.

chapter one

1.

Can I be convinced that the wheezing is for a lack of a better word? High pitched, almost screaming. Echoing and demanding attention from those so obviously weaker, from those so unwilling to emit those sounds for fear of attention—or death. Similar, perhaps, to the death-cough, the death-breath (yes, a rattle) that any palliative caregiver will describe with reverence.

I act as though I am invisible and am stunned to hear that you've been watching me for days. You are familiar with me and my movements. (I was so convinced that they were mine.) I've only just noticed you and your left-over hairstyle. (You would have been so beautiful during the decade I lived before my adolescence.) We were always asked, then, if we would rather fly or be invisible. I'd always fly. I can already act as though I'm invisible, become rude and impersonal, convinced that you can't see me looking.

2.

I concur, as an XO would to a captain of a naval ship. And I cannot help thinking of my navel, and how you can only rest once you have your hand resting there. I can lie to you, your hand slightly to the left, and that is enough. You rest. And I am thinking of my cord, disposed, unsightly first. What has allowed the connection to remain? What allows you and me, your XO to my captain. And I think of all the signing, XO, and how that meant nothing to me, not sure for a time which was the kiss, and wanting more. Evenly signed, I believe you as you believe me before resting. It is in the knowing, not in the saying.

3.

If you weren't married …

So much between three points. I remember high school and hearing the elegance of *ellipsis* for the first time. Beautiful. Lips inside: the initial attraction, certainly. I think to rearrange these points aiming for geometry and thinking that they might indeed encase, with space already carved out for three of my limbs.

That is, of course, unless we allow a break and unless we view the void between. ("The abyss in the middle … is of course the whirlpool of enjoyment threatening to swallow us all …: the pothole exerting its fatal attraction."[1]) I'm sure the fourth limb fits there somewhere and I hesitate before clicking SEND, hoping that you will read the humour but sense the space I am carving between three strokes.

4.

I haven't seen you in days. I hardly recognize you. When we first met, I remember a certain repulsion, but I sat next to you anyway. In a seat not designed for you, you struggled to limit your space, hunched, curled. I was disappointed with your hair, and the shape of your face did not appeal to me.

I don't remember what you look like anymore. I don't see your face or your hair or your hunching. I'm sure that I don't like your face any more, but I miss that when I look at you. I don't see you. But, I'm sure I could describe you to anyone willing to listen.

Later, when you tell me that you love my smile I am not concerned with meanings. It has been too long and I'm sure that you can't see me anymore either. Blending into backgrounds and fading into words, we disappear from each other, knowing only the ease of so much time.

5.

It was a stage production and I was watching you vomit invisible bile into a regulated receptacle. It was beautiful, I thought, watching you convulse, but only because I recall with some haze my prior undoings with those movements. If you had not been heaving on your stomach, if you had been turned over in the same bed, I might have believed *jouissance*.[2]

Perhaps I sense this only because my once unconscious desire to love you was accompanied by such ecstasy, leveling the morning after with cancer fumes—my receptacle not appropriate for measuring volumes, but accurate enough. I'm miming this heaving now, wondering what you would guess upon glimpsing the motion.

I am conscious of positions, and am willing to adjust or repeat with modifications.

6.

I still think back to that week when you told me that you loved me and I did not respond. I believed that you loved me only in jest, out of spontaneous laughter. I believed that you knew I would understand this and not respond.

I imagine you now, writing quickly and then hesitating before clicking SEND. I like to think that you wanted a reply because it was so unlikely. Perhaps I didn't have to be a safe recipient.

I wonder now, in the trite way we do, what might have been. Would we be able to spend afternoons lingering over coffee and books when we both profess to be out of time, when plans to work and read steadily were ours?

I like to think that you think about this, too, as you hold up my winter coat so that I may climb inside.

7.

I was born in the late seventies, which is practically the early eighties, and so people always ask me if my name was originally something else.

I have developed a distaste for the continuity of names anyway. I'm unfamiliar with the name I crave to use and too familiar with the diminutive. (I was born in the late seventies—there was little consideration for my future—the world was to end in my 22nd year.)

Call me what you like.

8.

I was never the silent type. To your strong and silent, I am somehow remiss, not certain that I am strong enough or certain that I am too strong. Grunting out the eleventh rep, and cheating to get it, I break the morning silence, the meditation of individuals, working alone. The conversion to morning person is solitary.

I'm not the silent type, so I'll compensate for your persona as we dine in pairs, leaving the individuals out of it—maybe they don't eat. Why would I eat alone?

I'm watching the growth and the recession and I stop my speech to avoid obsession or enthusiasm or ridicule. I'm learning that you know me too well and that we were both constant. I'm not going to allow you to believe that I'm not constant too. I wanted to be like you anyway and so I'll stop speaking and remind myself that you'll never see me beyond appropriate professional attire.

9.

Left behind, just a little, and resigned, perhaps, to solitary exhibitionism. A late bloomer, you claim, as way of explanation or comfort and I am thinking of the piles of laundry that have been relegated to the corners, to spend their days with the rolling creatures of dust.

I am not comforted. But, I amuse myself with less expensive household tasks: washing dishes, vacuuming. I say this is an attempt to be productive, but I think that I am reminding the witnesses that I am a capable wife.

Can she cook? Yes. Wait. That's his first question? I'm not interested. I'm not really interested in anyone who insists. I want to witness your preparation for me. I want to feel inadequate because I am watching you. I want to see the things you would do that I would never and I want to confess this years from now—or days.

Is she hot? The second question confirms it. I am unwilling to answer, but you answer for me. You use another descriptor, less flattering, but one that I readily apply to myself.

Remember the last time we ate together? Glass bowls should never be left on the stove. The elements are so clearly marked, but you've rejected the markings and act on instinct. I'll scream, but I forgive you by the time we eat. I remember chemistry and the warning: hot glass is indistinguishable from cool glass; proceed with a touch test if you are unsure.

10.

My little naked body allows a little light—two thirty-eight—and strains to identify the screaming, the "fuck." Repetition, male, and not distant enough; disturbing sleep, not able to work this one into the dream. ("The sleeper is suddenly exposed to an irritation, a stimulus coming from reality…, and to prolong his sleep he quickly, on the spot, constructs a dream: a little scene, a small story, which includes this irritating element. However, the external irritation soon becomes too strong and the subject is awakened."[3]) Streets below do not identify a source and I look up wondering if balconies might reveal. The screaming is shrouded, though, and I think that my breasts—once carved, stretched—are not for you to witness: the LED display provides only limited light, and cannot even attempt a silhouette.

11.

Screams again. And I ask you: is that a laugh or a cry? You tell me you are laughing and I must believe you. I have taught you the difference. I would not, otherwise, be able to ask the question.

You are watching me dress, so intently that I must be teaching again. Your will to dress for me is almost inspiring, but falls short. You are laughing.

You have told her you are laughing. I did not believe you. I heard pain and distress in your voice as I entered the room, the pain of abandonment and cries for attention. I am knowing you. And I think, now, that the question was meant for me to hear.

12.

Swallowing my lips again, I watch myself not in an effort to imitate a loss of teeth, but simply in an effort; teeth piercing the insides, only slightly, at the edges perhaps, the inside of where my lips end and my mouth begins.

And I can watch my reaction to this loss, my lips wholly disappearing. I am not pleased and I try to remind myself that if I do this often enough, wrinkles will form to prove the repetition. And it's not unlike the way you pointed out that I make the same face in the mirror every time I adjust my hair. I've never really seen this face; my eyes dart from part to strand, not the whole face, but if I hold it long enough, I do see what's left of it, a thin line, a wrinkle beginning, just above my upper lip. Now, I stretch it back, the other way, not quite swallowing both lips, just the top one.

Then again, it was only ever an attempt to swallow. My lips are too attached and I will not bite them off, or even taste blood. But perhaps I am practicing.

13.

The Variations began, begging for a descriptor. Amid marigold and sanctioned orchids, irises maybe, you insisted that something more was needed, that these variations needed a more particular name, needed an identification all their own.

It's been *exactly* four months since we stopped speaking for a time; I needed the distance and I couldn't explain that I needed to talk to you that morning over coffee, that our confirmation of plans by phone at 8 didn't include a warning that you weren't to be alone, that you were in the midst of the morning after. At 9 I wasn't prepared and I made small talk and drank coffee too quickly to notice. When you insisted later that you'd rather go home than continue with the afternoon's plans, I wanted to find myself insisting that that was fine and I wanted to be understanding. We stopped talking.

I've never been very good at suggesting that I didn't want to be ignored, that I needed anything; a coffee is too simple. All I wanted was to stop the craving for sugar, to limit my intake, and to steal some time. It is, of course, stolen, but like the sweet candy stolen from mother's purse, entirely lost.

We speak now, changed, and I needed to steal time tonight. And we will get back to *The Variations*. Your irises haven't changed much.

14.

Why do you love me?

I spent days pondering the possibilities—the impossible possibilities, none that would satisfy—not after having thought or said these words in the presence of my lover, but, after having discussed the possibilities in a one-sided conversation with Zizek. I know, I know. I'm invoking the name of this master of popular culture/discourse *so* early—his name almost rings trite.

The effort of writing or considering the possibilities is difficult because of a physical, aural manifestation—one of my neighbours—one of my neighbours that is disguised well by walls and doors—is producing—or is allowing the production of—a noise that resonates, that is a deep bass thud, that cannot be blocked by earplugs, that frightens me because it sounds *so* much like a pulse. I check mine constantly and find that mine is slower, more at rest. And, I worry that this listening that I cannot help will allow the two rhythms to match, like my heart rate will to my lover's.

But if I must, I will allow the acknowledgement that I haven't listened to another in quite some time.

15.

You smell of fish. It is on your hands and on your thighs. I am cleaning too quickly, too rough for your fished skin. There are dreams of fish, so large they must be portioned to be eaten; so large they would feed more than I could, portioned; so large they swim between my legs causing a strain, a stretch that I cannot hold. In these breaths, I am emptying air too soon, and my escape is forced. I would stay longer and learn to stretch; to view your ridges, filled in with blood before you can be fed; to limit my fear of losing limbs, your jaw contracting around my thumb; but my lungs are already weak.

chapter two

Chapter two has been deleted. It has been removed for your benefit. Do not hesitate to ask why. But, the answer is simple. I want to protect you from what I believed was possible. You have been good to me, so far, and I want you to love me a little longer. I want to hear your whispers, but I am soon to be deaf. Instead, I will feel your sighs, delete chapter two, and wait for you to ask anyway.

chapter three

1.

I follow instructions well. Though there were six beginnings before this one. In my head. I waited for the next instruction, wondering how I might begin, and wondering if the text was appropriate, and wondering what I should really call you. And I realized once again that words are indeed insufficient. So it's unfortunate that you demonstrate the sufficiency and leave me wondering, wondering what is left to be said.

I've been telling myself in the past days that it was not possible to continue in this way, to continue with prosaic metaphor and metonymy. It was not possible for the simple reason that you could read it. You were never the reader of verse, poetic lines. But, I suppose I should never have worried—you'd read me as an exception, not as a rule. You've read exactly one—one—work written by the hands, the fingers of a woman. One, that I gave you to read.

The car alarm—a horn—continues again tonight, as it has every night for a week. I should no longer worry or look out my window—hoping for commotion. The drive by—turning our heads to see the accident. You've said that I am, my life is an accident—one that is fascinating to watch, but one that we can so easily pass by—one that we do not need to think about further.

I'd forgotten so much about the way you sound. We'd imagined a way to spend years apart, and lived months at a time in this particular imagination. Your soliloquy, a reverent nod to Shakespeare and Chaucer and those who wander through, and wonder about time, suggests an impossibility of space between. You know that when you say "please stand beside me" that it will mean something. I will agree and nod again. I will agree once again. How can I but anything.

And you suggest that I call the one that I thought of first or last or second or third, now that you're done. There will be healing. Expertise. I think.

We've both come out or something to allow this coming now. We are just writing about it. Just write something. That's all we're asking. Can you do that much? Write the goddam thing. Embrace

the masturbatory necessity of it all. Know that he suggested it first—a year earlier than you—when all you could do was respond. And he to you, foregoing your words and images, and focussing on your name.

Deleuze asks, "How else can one write but of those things which one doesn't know, or knows badly? It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say."[4]

This is still prose. For the alcoholic of convenience (your phrase; not mine) the damn fine potion (your phrase; not mine) is drained … emptying. I experience a cerebral hunger now, but I only feel it in my stomach. Curious, I always feel the hunger in my stomach when I'm looking for it elsewhere.

I never know what to say when the suggestion of marriage or love is made. I return it with a thank you or an acknowledgement that is similar, guttural. Fearing only that it has been too long and that this will be too far removed from a very specific dramatic monologue in which I wanted to convey corporeal difficulties as they intersect and disrupt the day.

I've already forgotten too much.

Where did this begin?

A story—yes—about a necklace and a man somewhere that I have yet to or will never see. I fear that I will never remember. That this *will* all be a bad dream and upon waking be forgotten. And labouring with keys is also insufficient and it does not bring the memory into being. It is like Bergson's immense keyboard.[5]

I'm told a story of Rushdie, writing longer sentences when confined to the technology of the pen. I fear the I've been limited too much by the nature of my own media, that pens will never be sufficient again.

Beginning these stories with an I is exhausting. Were you serious in wanting me to write? My knees are sore and this kneeling is not enough tonight. Please oh please tell me to stop. I'll write until you suggest that this is enough for one night. (One thousand and one hours, perhaps?)

You've said that this will either help me to build this or hinder it. I still don't know which it is.

The result will be indeed a new media. The media, once delivered. The new media. The media once delivered knowledge by way of shock. This time, though, we are sad. This time in pieces. We hurt. This is pain. The new media may come of this. Without pens or less expensive household tasks.

You've learned to read again. And now you are a character in this. Another you. Too many yous already and I'm losing track. (Two may have been enough.)

It's become apparent to me that I must also consider the surroundings—that to string the pieces together without adequate space would not allow for that which we are inadequately writing about.

The hunger pains are not leaving. Who are you again? I'm sorry, I've forgotten your name. You've walked by me, stealthily saying hello to see if I would look. I do. I respond. You are gone. And the confirmation is simple: when I rejected you, you remembered my name. I remembered every detail until your visage was presented once more. Your name was removed entirely, and as sleep takes me, this one more time for lack of caffeine or something, I recall that I have you hidden somewhere online, in a diary that I kept for you who are here beside me now.

2.

If you respond with *I know* instead of *I love you*, it's much easier. It flows. To respond with the same is awkward and suggests that you do not have adequate words to exchange. To return the words is almost an insult, as to a chef or a crafter or a musician. And yet it is necessary, not because it is so obviously so, but because we have watched it. Indeed, no one would fall in love if we had not had our examples in Hollywood first.

It had to be the night of the storm. Me, worried that every pane has not been properly secured and knowing that I am too tired to check. Too much here in the too much warmth of my own bed, the heat just turned on for winter. It had to be the night of the storm when I would scream myself out of a dream, when I would wish—as I always do when that happens—that someone would turn around and hold me. Just being. And you, the night of the storm, from the distance of my couch, ask me if I am ok and of course I am. But you offer to hold me anyway and you do.

I'm straightening things out. It is the action best left for now. Putting things together, in order, straightening up. And coming to. Or coming up. And asking you not to ask or to accuse or assume or suggest that I buy some more practical devices for storage. Because I am already good at that, the storage.

Words terrify. These words terrify me, but for a different reason. They are not the words I would have chosen, that I might recognize elsewhere as the words I had meant. They are the words of a lacking, and a particular want. They are the words that are too simple to be called eloquent, but as always, they will have to do because certainly they were not my words to begin with.

I just have to promise myself to sit here, to sit down, when you start to write me into my head. I just have to promise to listen and to recall. You're telling me stories and I'm not sure if you're asking me to write them for you. I'm sure you could say them better. That is, I'm sure you could write them with far more precision and far less fear. This is terrifying and I know this. You have not given me the stories to be my own and besides, I've forgotten all of them by now. I don't remember your

precision. Carving, with precision, those moments, the six hours or three that could have been days when I was the silent one. And I did not feel fear and so let you fill time slowly. The contract was written in advance.

The greatest distance is also a seamless one. Your arm over my back, measuring, just so, the length from arm to breast. And so I wonder what you will think when you read this, because I was really only imagining comfort. But I'll hide this earlier so that you won't see it over my shoulder with a quick cut and paste.

Your stories were never really yours, but I will not take them from you. And so I will only tell mine as though they were mine. I will tell mine as it is now, having listened.

And I will give up the ordering mechanism that so neatly finished the first part. The first part, ordered by 0s and 1s and seeing this only as too cryptic, has also called it by the letters. It was the way they lived, with me, put away and ordered just so. Simply. This time, it would seem that the order has been less particular, awaiting something to suggest what I am doing wrong.

I am to speak to you of the storm again. But, I am not willing to look outside, to see my window and the world outside for what it is or for fear that I will like the look of destruction. I fear that I will miss the leaves, now gone, after only one more night and miles and miles of wind.

My fault is that I have never been very good at measuring distances or crowds. I am not a runner.

The greatest distance is of course the most arbitrary and senseless one—the one of time. Thinking it only through distance has produced a volume of metaphors from which I have likely taken much without knowing.

I wonder if this is a result of the screaming. I am quite sure that we are not able to control everything. Anything. And yet, powerful with our intention, we give a nod to the gurus of self-help. Help

yourself to more. Binge, in fact. It's selfless. Binge. And when it comes to the purging, find only that it is impossible to do what you had planned all along. That even with every instruction, we, I, fail.

I'm still trying to invent a method to cover these words in something that will protect you from their reading. I've found that all of our industrial and home economic barriers have done nothing to hide. This. The foil and the plastic wrap, the bags with a varied simulation of zippers (or maybe that was the real zipper all along). Because there are so many yous and you will read yourself as one or the other and get it wrong. There is no way that you will be able to guarantee that you are him or her. And you will not want to. Because, my dear, the distance is seamless anyway.

3.

What have you just given me? I'm tired and I'm sitting here. Waiting for you to call or call back or ask me something. To come and get you. I'm fearing and hoping. These are two—connected—which ask specific questions at uncertain times: What have you given me, here? Will you marry me? Are you married? I will make a list for you. Listing is always the way: a burned foot from water too hot from a bath drawn for me (a test of trust, I suspect, and I pass); notes on green paper; air and light and stretching and breathing. And this sadness of not knowing why you are still here, why I can feel you. But, you've left—taken your shoes and your bag—left only these notes and a length of film from Hollywood, purchased, not rented, with no need of return.

I'm writing about you now. The adjustment has been swift—too swift, perhaps. Or not enough. I've left this entirely and all I am to do is record some of you because I am fearful. Is this what they call inspiration? Or is this what they call an interval?

I fear that when you write your own story, I will be accused of writing you poorly. That you were always the one to have the words I was looking for—we were looking for—you were looking for. You've had the words all along, borrowed from your bibles. You said you had 3 or 4. I only remember the second one, the book of sheer hilarity, from your time spent remembering Augustus.

All of my imagined lovers see the world on film.

The boxes are only meant to organize and store. To neatly tidy and straighten. And to hide those things we are too not see for now. It's a clever device, really.

You are not my match in this life.
You are not my match—in this life.
You are not my match, in this life.
You are not, my match in this life.

There will be a breakfast of tea and toasts very soon. Always be afraid of those who drink tea (always your words, not mine). Who is left? No. Further away. Drink up. Yes, drink up. With a hint of ginger or lemon zest. Today is a day of tea and saltless wafers. I'm not afraid of me, yet, but I am afraid to call to hear your reaction. And I am embarrassed that I have not more carefully disposed of the tea bags.

The sun has not much disturbed my work, today. Clouded over, like the fish bowl imagines itself to be, reflecting little or none and asking for something or nothing. You are a clever one, aren't you?

The safety is gone from my Bic lighter. The safety I didn't know it had—I'd always assumed such mechanisms were obvious—a switch. On and off and 0 and 1. Simple. I consider it now and realize that it was safest because it was invisible to me. How did you know about this? (You've known all along. You've had the words all along.) I cannot explain it or this or you. Nor have you asked me to do so. The other imagined lover who was not my match—and I knew that too—would quote: "never apologize, never explain."[6] And this is just it. Just the thing to remind me. Because an explanation is either unnecessary or not enough, insufficient, and inadequate. And an apology is not an explanation.

And where have you gone? My dear oh dear. Where have you gone? The sun is shining now, returning to coax these words away and into the corner with the piles of dust, the ones that I am keeping for you. Or to coax these words into an invisible set of strokes, not seeing the result and only imagining and trusting that these movements are enough.

It's not the vein on the back of my hand that I worry about most. It's the dust that I breathe from sitting here. Opening a window is only a temporary solution. It's covering and overpowering. And as I wait for the rest to wake up and see this wind that moves it, I know that it will settle, again, and quietly. Only asking to be rescued once or twice.

4.

You are both too much alike for me to comprehend it all at the moment. You are both my muse. My muses. You waste away in your caves, shelves lined just so, with only the occasional visitor who brings you tea or coffee. Yes. That's the difference. I can bring tea to one of you and coffee to the other. Yes. That will keep you separate for me. Thank god you started drinking tea. This was even more confusing when you both drank coffee.

All of the others seem to have faded away. Who else do I need but you and you. The funny thing is—it's all in the hilarity—you are the same for me. It is either one or the other. And I never noticed it before. So I could talk of him to her and her to him all along. I'm not sure that I even noticed. It's even greater now because I know that you know that I loved. I loved you both, wouldn't you agree?

Thinking about it now, I'm quite sure that you never met. In fact, you will never meet precisely because you are not together in time. Not this time. Oh no. And so you will never meet.

If you had met, a long time ago, it was before I knew it would be like this.

Stealing words is a tricky thing. Why? Because they are all stolen—we learned that well—and all of our words will be too. What, then, is to be done about the citation? When you spoke only to me—I naïvely believed this to be so—I thought I would write this. You are my muse—nothing if not amusing. What is to be done? When you write your version of this, you will have to be careful. What if I give you permission now? Take this. Take all of this. And, what you like. Do what you like or what you are or help yourself. Yes. Please. Take some more. A second serving. I'm tasty. I tried it once myself.

Every moment—riding in elevators, alone and not with boys—the scroll is racing. Yes. I read best by scrolling now. Not true. No, but I write like this for a reason. It's faster. And if I take the time

to slow it down I fear I might stop evolution all by myself. Yes, I am powerful. But, mostly I'm arrogant.

All of your mothers have spoken to you. They taught to read by writing. They developed stutters for you, when you asked. And, when they were right, they *showed* you how to move out of here and move out of this. They showed you what we were not asking to see. They forgot that they were showing. But in this game, all we need to do is remember what we read. We see what is coming when we remember what we read. These elevators are not sufficient because when the doors open, they ask you to leave once more and again. And the perfect words that were there, slide away again.

I miss you. Stop telling me this. Do you have enough distraction? Please watch film. And see these connections. Brilliant. You both think that I'm writing about you now. And you're right, of course. It's simple, not easy. It's easy not simple. Thank you for that. Easy and simple are not the same thing. Simple and easy are not the same either. Because I miss you too.

I'm still wondering about the return.[7] I respond with I miss you too or I love you. But what I do mean to say is *I know*. When I do say this. If I do say this, it means more to me than the return. It's in the knowing, not in the saying. Did I say that before? I think so. Or was I quoting you quoting?

Perhaps. Perhaps yes. Perhaps more. Never explain. And I will not apologize. Because it's been too long an apology already.

My list for you has four items: a cave, a muse, books, and an interval.[8] Spice with imagination.

You have all these things and you carry them around. Yes, you were already portable. Trust me. I could have carried you. I lied when I said that I couldn't carry loads long distances. I could carry you to any destination. And we could buy and spend many things.

Display shows time purchased. Oh thank god.

The books were easy. Easiest. (The first one is always easiest.) And it was easy to explain the cave and the muse to you. But you worried too much about the imagination. I said: Imagined things are to be left to the imagination. But that's the thing. They are only imagined. And that's they key. It's in the thinking for muses. And muses are always distant in a way that is completely intangible.

Your response is simple: The first thing that comes to mind is imagined conversations. And, yes, of course. This is it. Right here. And now and this is precisely it. This time in pieces. But, it was our imagined conversations this summer that brought us here.

You worry when you read this that I am in love with you. And I am not.

We were matched for a time. But you are not my match. Thank you and good night, my sweet.

Get thee a wife. Certainly. I'm going to get it soon. Can you tell? Or is this just arrogance of plenty. Because certainly, I need no wife. I need only tea. And toasts.

I'm sorry you had to be my muse. But to the one who drinks tea, thank you for knowing you were. You already felt my thanks in you.

5.

Order is insufficient like words. And neither matter this time.

6.

These are tense times. They are asking for proofs that are mathematical. This is tricky. Nothing comes from nothing. But we were wrong and the poor king was wrong too. Look around.

I know why you've used initials. Nothing comes from nothing. But we were wrong and the poor king was wrong too. Look around.

I know why you've used initials. You preserve the autobiographical scandal of it all—the preservation of anonymity. Those who are most painful need to remain anonymous so that they can become the characters for fiction. You had one of the answers. Instead you've come to me in apartment 409 with a usefool tool. You are going to start all over. Start all over, you useful tool.

You had the answers all along and this was too scary to believe. Because I was not you. (She glows and grows her garden and then lets it die to see the creativity and evolution of the weeds which can consume slowly and steadily.) I tried to see marigolds grow, but they died because I would not keep them in the sun. Water was not enough. The weeds, though, did not survive and so their death was not beautiful. There was a drying. Crumbling to seeds.

I've grown old. I visited my mother and the trees that came to my child-knees have surrounded the house. It is now partially hidden. There is very little light that gets in these days. It is all fluorescent and incandescent. (The halogens have been taken away. Fire.) Fire. The light is on the inside. There is no need for light outside. It is all temporary. And you look around with me, seeing what's hidden below and within. Because we've brought out sheers and so we can cut a path, as I sing songs silently about growing old and seeing the shape of your face that did not appeal. You are strong. You could have carried me all this way. I am strong. I could have carried you all this way. I have said that I wouldn't offer to do that because I love you. You will walk alone this time. And I can thank you for bringing me this far. This is far. Far.

Look around. There are no signs here. None. Hiding. (Look again.)

I fear that I will have to abandon the first chapter. It is too far removed from all of this now. And yet it has allowed this. I spoke mostly of you, allowing others to distract me. I fear that the insults have accumulated, though, and that they will not be pleased. That they will read the personal remarks. Take it. Take it personally. Take me with you on this journey, my friend, my love. Take me. Take me with you. Take me to this place of laughter and forgetting. Take me to this intended place where you no longer see. Where you did not need a plucking, only a little bit of blood. A little bit of blood every month. A cup or two. Drink it up. The cup is always full for you. There are no halves because you have forgotten to drink. You forget that you have drunk. I'm drunk with lust. (I lie.) Teach me to be drunk with lust, because you are only an imagined lover. You are not a teacher. This is why I disappoint. I am disappointed. You are the appointed one. Anointed one. Anoint me. Amuse me. You are nothing if not amusing. You are nothing. Nothing comes from nothing. And this is the riddle. Because nothing comes. Nothing that comes is here. Nothing is here. Here. Look. (It is a riddle of hearing and seeing again. Who will see and who will hear.) Here. Look.

7.

My smell has changed again. It's been this way for a few days and I think it might be from the bleeding or the changing. Are we changing? Are we changed? Let me wash a while. Let me watch a while. Watching is different than seeing. (Like easy is not simple.) I think I have to go outside now to watch a bit. I mean to see a bit. Never mind. I'm taking my camera. So I can forget all of this, *this time*. Let me leave the remembering to you.

I know why you've done this and I thank you but I'm not sure if I can believe you. You've given me the beginning, but now this is mine. It's time to take this away from you. Take away. Three take away one. Two take away one. Take away one of you and it is simpler for me but just as impossible. Have I identified my two muses yet? Do you know who you are? Of course. And it's a greater experiment because I've chosen to read this.

Then again, my smell is changing because I am eating more or less fish. I think I am eating less because I have one to accompany me now. I have a friend here. More or less. A friend who is hungry, who will not binge, who is providing a frightening example for me of who I am not. I will either binge or do nothing at all.

It is too late to look for a new muse, one that will be mine.

It is too late to look for a new muse to amuse me because I have given myself over to spending all of this time alone. Even my time spent surrounded by others. They are only mirrors anyway and I prefer to steal from you. I'm stealing your image for this. Yes. Here you are, masterful one.[9] And I did not bring my camera this time.

There's something to the camera. No. There's something to the photograph. No. There's something in the photograph. There's something in it, especially when it is not beautiful, when it is boring. When you call me a photographer and when you ask me if I get it, I can only answer that I do not.

I think my fish is hungry but he will not eat. I've taken him out to dinner for wine and elegant dining and a little bit of dancing, but he will not eat. He will not binge and so he will not eat at all. It is binging or nothing and he chooses not to binge and so there is only one other answer. There is only one other answer. And that is nothing. And we know that there is power to one. But, I'm still waiting to see the power of nothing. When he dies, we will have an elaborate funeral. There will be candles and bubble bath and I will burn something, likely myself. And you will join all of the others in the yellowing and browning water. You will visit my neighbors who claim to have better food and better gardens to grow it in.

I let my marigolds die because I would not give them sun.

I must leave. I must leave with my camera right now. But I am too tired and too tied. And not tired enough yet. I will binge or I will starve and I cannot find the in between this time (in pieces):

Finally, I'm moving away from you. No wait. You left. You left me with a day or with twelve hours and this makes a new day. You only need a minute or a second or a split second infinitely if you time it right. If you measure from here to there to anywhere. Time it. Or tire me. Tie me. No. Let me leave this place with a notebook and a camera or with nothing and a camera.

It's best if it's boring and better if you like it.

8.

I started it all.

I invited you to join me and red wine.

What is this now?

She is part of every book about this place. She is the only one who makes an impression that lasts. Perhaps this is the thing about photography. You need only mention the photo and you can appear. I want you to read this, but I am scared that you won't get it or will be offended or will get it or won't recognize yourself or will.

You are the only one who could possibly read this and be properly offended. That's the beauty of it: you've asked to be offended, but I'm not even trying. And if you take no offense and offer only praise, I will smile on the outside and wonder if you are lying. No consolation will do. I will suspect that I am being fooled. Because I am. You have fooled me this time.

Why is this now?

I started it. Remember? (I couldn't possibly have started this. I can take no credit for this anymore. What is going on? I can read the holiest of your bibles and make no claim to read at all.) I invited you here. Was it this place in which we must both dwell, alternatively as resident and guest? Must we always share this place? I invited you here. And now you have taken me.

Where are we going now? I'm scared. I'll admit it. I've been silenced, and I was *never* the silent one. I would fill every space with a word, with an imperfect answer or a question neither perfect nor imperfect. But since there are no silences (your words or a shutter fill it all and fill it whole), I have stopped speaking.

So today, I must act. I must act out. I must pass through the act. No one can suspect this. Not today. Tell them what I'm doing. You said that you were writing. And you are, but this started with a wish for me or for someone else or for everyone else. This has nothing to do with me anymore, so I will become the recorded and write things down with no sense of their meaning. Because I could not read your bible. I did not have the language or the words. I cannot read without direction or in other directions. And we will give these all page numbers, because we are told it is the only way. What would happen if a number was missed. Look: it has not happened. Because I can act, and in this lead role, I will follow.

I don't know where we are going? I had to go and you've asked that I return. But you don't know that I will act today. That I must give a performance, carefully, skilled. I will play along. Because this is all a game today and no one knows it yet.

There are plans to call my other muse, but I must wait until you call me. I am far too careful this time. My muses like to leave me here alone. One has asked that I follow. One is taking me along. I have asked for neither or both and the problem is once again that I am only here. Only here.

9.

A simple request, yours. You would like clarification. You would prefer that these riddles—this game—come out, come in to rationale. And here it is:

It is fall. The air feels like winter already. I've given up hope that the air will warm again. Three days ago, I wanted to drink wine with a friend. It was Friday, and I did not want to spend the evening alone. You made your arrangements and I made mine. I used my car to get you and then we decided that it would be a date between friends. Dinner and a movie. Simple. Then wine.

You decided to drink green tea instead and as I sat sipping wine, you told me a story four hours long (or short). Perhaps this was your life story. But, no, it was just a soliloquy—performance art with an audience of one. I am sure that I was paying or would pay a fee for admission. Like the best entertainment, this would ask me to retrieve every emotional memory.[10] I'm nearly in tears. I was tearing. (I can hide it well.)

Your stories were of men and necklaces, travel, reading, listening, and alcoholics of convenience. I was drinking wine alone and you were drinking tea.

You stayed here. We used to do this more often: you would stay here, in my bed or on the couch. Simple. We would respect our spaces, touching only by accident.

I wake screaming at 7:45. My head begins to write things—I slept that night only after a session of purging, of filling this screen with the thoughts that were there. After the binge, there is nothing else.

Drinking only water now—the rest of the bottle of wine is still in my kitchen, corked, unfinished. You refill my glass. I believe you are taking a shower, but you are preparing a bath for me. There are ten candles. (Yes, I noticed. Did you?) You fill the tub with only hot water and so I scald my foot, trusting you. I add cold water for minutes and follow your instruction to ensure that the last water to come out should be hot. I soak. And for minutes, I can stop thinking.

You've left notes that say you are still here. You are my muse, so you may never leave. (My muses try to leave me, but I keep them here. They are willing prisoners.) You tell me to breathe, prepare for breakfast, open a window, let in some light, and stretch. I do. And I begin to purge once more.

I worry. You call. We have breakfast. And I eat sausage for the first time in a year. I'm still regretting this particular. I'm regretting that I ate pancakes that I did not prepare. I'm regretting that I ate eggs that I did not prepare. They drip with oil and I soak them in syrup to hide the taste of the oil.

You continue your purge, and I hear every word. But, most of them are probably forever gone from my memory. You are glad to have chosen me for this performance, but you didn't test my memory in advance. Oh, yes, you did test me, many times before, but you forgot the most important test.

You keep speaking, and I am still silent. I say nothing. I only feel that I am forgetting and that I hurt trying to move this into memory. Even if I were to take notes, I would never refer to them. Pen and paper are insufficient. I never look back.

You laugh. (It's the laugh of the crazy people and so I doubt that this is craziness at all. I am standing in front of a glass pane, touching it, and on the other side is craziness. All I need do is break the glass. But, I hate to clean up broken glass and I hate to cut myself. I'm not brave enough, methinks. Yes, we profess too much.)

My apartment proceeds to become unlivable. The dishes aren't washed or even stacked. The blankets aren't folded and the television isn't put away. I'm trying not to eat, because I don't want to see the kitchen. So instead, I binge on granola bars that I take in the dark. (Not a capable one, today.)

When you call the next day, you demand that I come quickly and bring as much film as possible. Four rolls of thirty-six will have to be enough. I record your words written on walls and I begin to

wonder if collaboration is allowed. You say we are working. We are. We are creating something. But, I wonder how much of this story is real and how much I am making up. How much can we prove? How much we can prove. And if I have pictures. (This is an old and battered debate. Why bother. I told him he was a muse, but he didn't want to know. Or, I didn't want him to know and I will regret all of this soon. He will read this and never speak to me again. But, that's ok, because this will too soon be finished. Or perhaps we can just burn it. This is also a performance and all good performance art is not recorded. Or, it is temporary. Or, it is best when witnessed during the performance. Too bad you aren't here right now. You'd laugh to see me write. My feet and hands are cold and you would laugh because the solution is simple: Close the window. It is fall but the air feels like winter and it will not be warm again.)

I have pictures now, but what use are they? They are not mine. They are yours. (Ownership of the image. Explain this to me.)

I think I was supposed to arrive again yesterday. But, you did not specify time or place. And I was tired. I remained here, in my mess. But I did not write as I should.

And now I must explain the first section. The first section of short fragments. No. They are pieces. Not fragments. There is a difference. (Easy and simple are not the same.) Let me explain:

They began this. They were widely read with much approval. They were about the other muse and about (many, many) others' coming and going. But, yes, they were about the other imagined love, the other imagined lover. He knows, now. But, that doesn't matter. It was all in the imagination anyway. We shared only a common imagination, nothing more. I wanted to relate my body in those pieces. Or, I wanted to relate the pieces of my body, because I had seen them in pieces for the first time. Here was a bicep and a pectoral. They separate. I'm getting fat today, and so I will not eat. I will drink tea. (Don't tell the ones who profess too much that I've said this. Don't tell the one who is at fault in this, but it may be time.)

My other muse is still here, and sometimes he is you. Sometime you are. And there are other yous too. I like the other yous best because I can't separate them anymore. This is best. All of you are simple because you are not me. You are the muse. There are no twins anymore. Because this is the same. And space is irrelevant. It is different this time, because it is *this time*.[11] Tell me what I should have cut out, what is no longer sensible, what does not pass as poetry. Tell me that I am not writing prose. This way, I will be certain that you will not read it. You do not read poetry, my love. You do not read writing by women, my love. When you decide to hate reading, let me know. Because then I can stop. Perhaps we have had enough of theory? Wait. This is not done yet. It is only that theory is no longer interesting, because there can be no more theory. We have all binged for too long. Now we must begin the purging. Eliminate slowly, though. I've seen what can happen mid-convulsion. The receptacles are never sufficient, I will not recognize you anymore, your silence will tell me you love me, your exhibition will be your performance, we will all scream, we will eat too much fish, and we will agree that this is all a game. The ball is round.

10.

You've called to say you've returned. But since I can't read your words—the ones that are left for my voicemail to repeat—I think now that you might have simply re-turned. After all the resignation, after all the re-signation, I am quite sure that you are not well, but that together we were making something.

My kitchen is clean now. The mess we made is gone. I think I miss it. I spent hours staring at the wine stained glasses. I filled them with water and watched the rings disappear. All that remained were the drops of red at the bottom. With a swirl, they began to spin upwards. There were no more concentric circles, only spirals. Only cones filled up to the brim. The water can swirl around and paint until the wine stains are gone.

I'm learning that writing is a morning process. No. It's a mourning process. No. There is no procession, only profession. And I have professed nothing until now. When you silenced me, I could only ask for your forgiveness and give you my confused thanks.

No one wants to return the calls now. Every message contains a code, contains something else that begs explanation. But, there will be no more explanation or apology. There can only be captions.

You've called to say you've re-turned. Re-turn of the one who knows too much, who asked too much of Gertrude. (She had all the answers, but she will share none of them with you. She shares none of them with me. She took a wife and that was enough. My wife died long ago.)

You've called to say that we should wait to caption the photographs. That it is not yet time to add the words to the images. I suppose we need not wait: they are fully captured already. They always were. Captions are not far behind.

And you will not be my next wife. Becau
before. My flesh is coming together. The you loved me a bit too much, and your flesh was sullied
made something together. The audience separations are weak. We've separated ourselves. We
There are no more words because they lof one was as much a part of the soliloquy as the words.
ave all been written down.
I'm not explaining enough. I'm trying to
have returned. You have resigned becaemind myself to explain. Let me explain: You called. You
later. Does this make sense? Mother is vse the re-signation was not acceptable. We will caption
be a wife. Nor will you bear my childrenorried. She thinks that Gertrude was wrong. I will never

11.

It's 2:24 pm. I've been leaving since 6:30 am. It is far too late now.

I've spoken to you again. Just now. Just then. What seems to have happened is that I have begun to speak in soliloquy? I hear it now. And I can't stop it. It's not just you. (When you cease to read, tell me to stop. I cannot stop until you no longer read.)

I suggest: tell me, oh wise one. Tell me something. Anything. Or nothing. I must focus because I must tell us all everything that I know. Oh my: I am proving myself insufficient again. And I'm scared for what you will say when you read this. Because when you tell me that you will never speak to me again, I will already know. Or not. Or perhaps you will give up reading by then. Forget. Or move elsewhere where you do not know the language and begin again. I suggest a place without these characters; these languages are too easy. (Learn new symbols. That is harder. Because they are only symbols and it is not reading until they are not.)

What I know now: Madness is transferable.[12] The appearance, even more so. What is being shared in this new technology of the archival? What did you call it? Technomics? There are no technopolies now. They have all died. And we have picked up again, the technomic value system. We will shop at Ikea because then we can buy things that everyone already owns. There is no need to make it personal. We just have to avoid yellow and blue and then it is enough. When I right my novel that is set in India, remind me to bring moon shaped receptacles and remind me to bring my own teacup. Because the moon-shaped receptacles are never big enough and my teacup is too small. I will have to communicate, this way; I will have to ask for more if I want to binge and more if I want to purge. Careful planning will be essential.

Your companions have met without you and decided that you might need help, that they are concerned for your well being. This is nice. You were not there and neither was I. They should have asked me first because I would not have responded. And I am the only one who knows.

Here is the pane of glass. Now: we are on opposite sides. Now: we both see a little madness. Now: who will shatter this pain first?[13] (I'll be the first to admit that I don't approve of the cutting.)

Remind me that I don't want to discuss Lacan or his friend zizek because they do not play well with others. We played together once and Lacan pulled my hair while Zizek bit my arm. I still have the teeth marks and I might be going bald. All I said to deserve this: the ball is round.

12.

See? I was listening.

Are you worried that I've joined you? Had you wanted this to be solitary exhibitionism? (No. Wait. That was me, the solitary exhibit. Alone forever with my two muses who are imagined lovers and nothing more. Nothing less. Or nothing at all. Damn the imagination. Damn the imaginary. Damn it all to hell. Or not.) Had you really wanted a companion? I'm asking you this now because you seem frightened by my words, this time. Or, am I just reading you wrong? Am I reading wrong? Is reading wrong? Someone tell me, because I fear I've been misled.

They always said that it would be the great readers who would be the great writers. Who is greatest this time? The readers or the writers. Too much is being written already and so we need not pay for words. The readers should indeed be paid. A pleasure, it is, to be read. Once more, you are asking who was doing the writing.

But, if you've read anything, you will have to fear the train heading north.[14] You know the one. It's the train that heads north at the beginning of the novel and it's enough to know that it's not your line. It's from a letter or elsewhere. And all searches are pointless. But, the searches are also effortless, because you can plug and play. Play and plug. Stop up the wholes and ask for new meaning. Why? Because you are searching for the train heading north and I have taken the train that heads east. You will never find me there. You will blame the trains, though, for taking me. It is best to have something to blame. Because the transferability is only temporary and when I recover, you will want to know what happened. Because I will not be able to say, you can blame the trains. (This tale was yours alone. Yours for the making. You only had to give it to the runaway.)

Let me say again: The first sixteen pieces are short. There are separable. They were written a long time ago, but they started all of this. (I do not need trains heading north.) They introduce you and you and you. They tell a story of love that wasn't anyway. And they forget to mention that the love was later confessed, on both sides. They leave out the writing that happened at the time of the

confessions because writing in the confessional mode is antiquated. (And so I do it everyday.) What happened? Nothing. Loves moves away. Girl moves on. Girl is quite sure she might not have cared. You would not want to read what I wrote at that time. Trust me.

chapter four

1.

And so now I begin again. In the same mode.

2.

I fear you may be coming out of this. A
Don't go yet. I still have more writing

d, once again, you may be bringing me with you. Don't go.
o do. This should all end so soon.

But I will explain once again. I will ex

lain what happened, simply and easily.

We met four years ago, perhaps exac
intriguing and interesting and time d
would tell me of things that I already

ly. (I could look. I wrote it down somewhere.) You were
d not separate us. Space was only a misnomer. Soon you
new and I would love you. It was simple.

Four days ago, perhaps exactly: You v
I would not be. (I'm not looking for a
Oh that we were we.

uld have to leave because I was the perfect wife, but wife
ife either. She left me many years ago.) Oh that I were she.

Let me explain. You are not alone. I
years were dedicated to you, and th
denied more. It was best. It was easy.

et you two years ago, not exactly. Too many of my early
n came the pages. But we embraced the simplicity and
I am still convinced that it was my decision.)

And so, you have left. You've left me

one. And you are angry with loneliness: mine.

Never to be wife. Only to listen.

What we have learned: It is not socia
I start to sound like I am writing—I a
these notebooks with senseless lines a
all the permission I'll ever need, bec

y acceptable to speak in metaphor. I said: Do not worry, if
. Pick up a tape-recorder or write something down. Take
write them into something or write them into me. Give me
se I am no wife nor one do I seek.

3.

There are littered answers: scraps of paper, or napkins, or notebooks. The error is in the pen. It suggests a permanent release with no need of return.

We should meet. I am quite willing to travel or host. I am quite willing to bring bread. I am quite willing to spend every dollar. I am nothing if not willing. I am nothing if not already.

Speak to me again, my muse. The one who has already left me no longer speaks. He has left his metaphor at the door and contacts me only to be cordial. There is a limiting factor here. The rare words—the ones not defined when we check our spelling—will provide scope, matter, and image.

Speak to me again and use only rare words. Simple is never enough.

4.

What I have discovered: it is not a visible purge, but you only come when I am not clean enough and when I am hungry. There is a certain lightness, then. And a certain cold. The answer is evident. I must close the window. But it is dark now, when I leave and when I return, so I fear that a closed window will prevent you from visiting. You are still here. The papers tell me this much.

The notes have been collected though. Their scattered positions have been neglected for days. Here, piled, are the remains you have left me. The wine glasses have been cleaned and wait only to be put away.

I think now that you should join me for dinner today. I'm sure you haven't eaten in days. How else could you begin such thinking. I want to feed you bowls of soup, the kind we tasted once before, the kind that is right for you and too spicy for me. Yet I repeat the addition every time. And the result is the same. Math is nice. Until you confuse it with physics or biology, there is always an equation. Let us eat soup together. It will warm us both even if I do not close the window yet.

I worry that we will separate very soon. I sense condensation. This time it is easy to measure. Counting will be involved. I proved once that I could remember three. I willingly forget the first and speak slowly so that the twins will hear.

We've learned to make great generalizations, now. Our referencing system is flawed because we need only names. There will be no more numbers this time, because it is *this time*.

5.

It is perfectly reasonable to expect that you know too much. I was only too willing to reveal it all. You were honest and so I returned the favour. The trick was that you believe everything I say. The trick is that disavowal comes too late. I was nothing if not revealing. Nothing if not willing. These are tense times.

6.

The prunes do not feel like dried fruit. They feel soft, they give. They feel like you. I reach in for a handful and find myself sticky. I eat them, this time, even though they are sweeter.

Your mother called today to ask if you were well. I said that you were, of course, fine. I said that the metaphors will only last for a short time because soon too soon you will leave me too. You will leave me with some stickiness and a mess to clean, but you too will go. The metaphors will end and I will be convinced that you have stopped reading. I will know because I will have stopped writing.

I will leave you with these fictions.

7.

Can you be my new muse? The others are leaving me all too gleefully. You have words I do not use. Your twenty-six letters combine and recombine far more often, far more variably than mine. Its simple recombination. Reproduction. Reproduction of difference, not of kind. And we retreat yet again.

Too sweet, this treat. Too sweet. Not sullied any longer, I worry that I've neglected my teeth, that cavities are forming, and that my dentist will pull each tooth, return it to me in a sealed bag, give them names, and then leave. I miss my dentist, because he knows something of tea and cake. His martial arts were nothing compared to your marital ones. You were more artful, with nods to your favorites on your wedding day. You need not explain, not because you would, in principle, prefer not to, but because I already know. I understand. I get it. You should probably apologize, though, because you shouldn't have said anything. I was more comfortable blaming myself for this narrative. You shouldn't have joined in.

I'm waiting.

The difficulty: I'm forgetting, now, what came before. I forget and so the fictions are becoming repetitive. My forgetting is not willful, or not willful enough. I'm still trying to grasp the ball.

The solution: Unlearn instant coffee and instant messaging. Slow to the speed of red light. (Read means stop.) Red means stop. Eat more gingersnaps, or at least drink ginger tea.

There are only twenty-six letters. Everything sounds like something someone might have said.

8.

I remember when your legs didn't work very well. It was a scary time. I would call and if you would not answer, I'd worry that you could not reach the phone, that you might be lying on your kitchen floor waiting for recovery or waiting for me. I hoped that you'd brought the cordless with you before you fell, but I knew that the battery was weak anyway. Besides, you'd turn the ringer off, too, to limit the distractions because there are many.

Leaving soon or coming to our senses. My senses. My sentences. Coming to them, slowly, not quickly anymore. I have slowed the speed by hand. There was a climbing, a rhythm for a while. Now we only struggle. I only fear. These walls that held you, weeping, these walls which held a weeping woman, hold me too, support my back so that I can read what you've written. I worry that if I lean too far, rest for too long, I will erase the words with my back, that the print will leak into me, that I will have to read the words backwards or in a mirror.

Your way with words is simply not mine. I am not as artful, but I can make progress when starved. I can make progress while I wait for tea.

You've taken me on this tour of the sensory. Sensories. I find that this noisy restaurant is limiting thought and thinking, and that words that come to me in dreams fade instantly, like lemon in tea, in this busy-ness. You are my muse, my dear. The last one met me here for lunch before leaving. Were we to meet now? For breakfast? Or was it lunch? Am I early or would you have already left. You said: Prepare for breakfast. (Beginning the day with a bubble bath is too much a luxury. We should have bought florescent light and installed a shower room.)

9.

It is a mistake to think that we should not start at the beginning. This did not begin with the wine. I knew that. I know now. But thank you for joining me, or for watching me. I was listening. That was all I could do. My role, stage directions and all, was set before. I was never the silent type, but I began listening.

Before leaving you said more than I did.

I've cooked too much fish. It will surely go bad before we can sit together to eat. (She eats alone. She works alone. The eating was always solitary.) There will be no more fish-making today. Instead, only flesh-making.

The ingredient list is not lengthy: lard (any amount will do); sugar (from the raw); curved space and infinite time (let's call this being); a few words that sound like magic (imagination is key).

Let's begin. Yes. Let's. Beg. In. Begging on the outskirts of town. There are no passersby to donate to the cause. There are no arrests either, only a slow withering. I think I might even be able to hide here if I am careful. This is not a profitable venture, but the perfect place for magic.

And here I will play the alcoholic of convenience. I will wear my yellow coat with the flannel lining. I will drink my elixir from a paper bag, , and I will forget the bottle. I am not enough a princess. You too, my love. You are far too much a duchess and not enough a princess. We've both been looking for the prince, though. It's too bad he left.

You met him once, this prince of mine. He said nothing to you because he had not yet learned to speak. You said too much, but he believed you. And so, he was wrong. He saw only brilliance—how appropriate—and he was right. But he did not see the duchess in you, the one who would be booed. The one I would love and the one I would feed.

But my job, I think, was only to archive, to record, to bring along my camera and thereby see things. There is a difference between making and recording. Look. I see it here. You made this stuff, but you did not see this just like this. You let me loose in here. You let me loose on you. Losing something of it in all the mess, but recorded lightly.

The ground on the outskirts of town is softer than you might expect. I've dug a tunnel in the dirt. No, the tunnel does not lead anywhere. It's as valuable as the fortress in my mother's basement made of every sheet, even the ones on the beds. It can be sold for as much or as little. But, the ground is still soft, so I can put it back to the way it was before. These are games with time or simply a game with something round.

I think the seduction has worked, you say. I move home, to my infinitely expandable universe. I need infinite expandability. Perhaps pens will be useful again very soon. I'm filling this too fast and have left my tools, my fabric, my yarn outside the city.

10.

There's something in your blood when you are an alcoholic of convenience. Wine tastes so good. And even better alone. Dehydrate first. Draw some water to seem a bath. (Hot water only at first. Add cold. Then hot. Enjoy.) Drink up. Yes, drink till you are pruney. Feel your flesh revere the moisture as it lets go its own.

We can medicate with wine when we feel that caffeination will no longer suffice. We can speed at the fast of thought. We can speed the fast of thought. We can think at the speed of thought. We can think the speed: fast. And then slow again. There is a rolling rhythm to it.

You are here, drinking milk in champagne glasses. All of them filled with milk so that you will never be hungry.

I must starve myself a while longer. I must go and attempt to earn these separations. I must separate flesh from bone, tissue from tone. And so I will find my new muse. I will find that my new muse is delighted with me.

Slowly, slowly, I think that I might have left you both. Just because you move and I stay does not mean you have left me. I have stayed in the garden apartment. I maintain it for your use and abuse. Sitting here, I left you. I will desert you before I can find the desert. (Damn. I promised not to play like that.)

11.

I'm giving up. Here, in a word, are the words of chapter two. You can see them now. (Remember: I get to edit the fiction this time.)

In a word, I'd say absolutely nothing. The option of something or nothing or all and I'll always pick the most remote, the option most distant from a desired outcome. Yes, desire.

It's coming out of me in drops and sweat that form puddles on either side of this machine, just beyond the edges, and it must be mopped up before you can take your turn. I'm quite convinced that you have not realized that I have written this in my head before, that I've been sanctioning the limited action.

I'm quite convinced that you have not realized that I have written this by hand before. That I sanction limited action.

I needed a story tonight, I think; and one more complicated and more enthralling than mine; I was going to SEND you things I have been writing for distraction; yours or mine; things that are braver than this; more daring; risky; but I worry about you reading them so I will keep them for me; and over-employ semicolons. I wonder if Bal writes about semicolons too.[15] I wonder if a semicolon is as beautiful as ellipsis … I wonder what remains unsaid with the semicolon … so much can be left out with an ellipsis, used properly … I think that's what I read today … maybe … please try to let me forget that you will be leaving soon.

Lengthy silence is filled only by your anxious marking on the back of a handbill you took for this purpose.

And we move on. But, now I'm thinking about what you said and what I said and how I want you to know that I might love you. But I recognize the limits of our situations and somehow that matters. Perhaps I am not a very good romantic. Hopeless, just not romantic.

The clarification that I want to suggest: I want you to know that if things were different, I'd allow myself to be in love with you. I've rejected a few lately—and I think you once asked me if I'd reject you too—but I wouldn't. Simple: I'd wrap you in clarification.

And so I worry that I jumped too quickly. That I did not let you explain, clarify. That, really, what you were trying to say was that in this world you aren't in love with me. You were telling me to cease offering, and that your hesitation, and possible regret, was because you knew that saying would wound me. You knew that I would respond too quickly, though. Or, in seeing me respond too quickly, you knew there was no clarity in your words and I was too willing to explain this to myself.

I'm sure I'll see you again.

I was so convinced that what I was feeling was release, that at last I was letting go, willing to stop considering the possibilities. (Is this really just a series to avoid clarity? Is there a between between this and clarity.) I was looking for the comfort or for the luxury of certainty. That you were leaving and I was letting go. I was ready for that and for the coffee to follow.

I played out in my head what would happen if I made the confession—this confession, really—in a manner akin to sit-com or dot-com style brevity. I would say, as an apology or an explanation, that I had considered you. That I had wanted to tell you that I had thought about this. That I wondered if you had thought about it too. That I was sorry for it. That you are beautiful to me and that you smell good. And that I can remember your smell.

I hadn't anticipated (or calculated or measured) your repetition of the said-elsewhere: In another possible world, I would love you. (That was my line.) My response: And I you.

And you remember the date of our first coffee. I remember drinking tea.

But I won't say anything else. I won't confess the fantasy.

And I regret saying that I wouldn't change anything. Saying that I trust this. Because, really, I'd like to tempt the possibility. And I'm tempted to move towards it. To confess further. To ask why you prefaced with "I'm probably going to regret saying this, but . . ." Is it because you think I think it will mean too much, more than the possible?

Why do you love me? Should I pause and allow myself to be here to be loved? What are you saying to me? (Where are the reagents when you need them?) If it seemed possible, I'd let myself fall in love with you completely and this incomplete (incompetent) diversion would be even more trivial.

It's been a while, you and I. We've been a while. Here. Resting. Chapter two was impossible and difficult. To read. To write. Entirely too simple. Entirely too long. Begging you for an answer because you asked the question. And my knees were tired. So I decided to take up running.

Should this still be about you now that I've decided that you are leaving and that your leaving does not mean that I am abandoning you? I teem with the possibility that you are really gone and that I am not completely satisfied with you.

To mark the say, the day, the saying, at last, of our mutual agreement that we are leaving—you are leaving—but that you are not leaving me and I am not leaving you. I sit down on my black vinyl covered bench, sterile, felt the clamp and the needle. Breathe out and feel yourself breathing out all of your bodily sensations. Heart rate rises and you are near, I'm sure, but so far from my thoughts, you're nowhere. And I'm still here.

epilogue

1.

A simple case, you say, of writing too ly. Oh, my muse, hold me far away from this so that I may see it more closely. Give it time, ay. Time is easy because it needs no coaxing.

All has slowed. The red lights are not distant enough—I can see them. And so these strokes now plod, slow to the rhythm of restir reat silences. Only cars.)

I too will mutter, begin to sip some tea

Until that time when we sit in glass roo ith three walls, calling them fishbowls, I too will mutter. But my cloak is not appropriate for th weathers. I am far too cold and far too wet for this. Or perhaps this is not me at all.

The trick: letters are persuasive anywa

2.

Despite all our efforts, time continues as expected. An hour into this and you were wondering about the possibility of ending or endings. Yes, indeed. Endings are meant for finite stories about infinite time. *This time* endings are not for stories, it might seem.

You've contacted me, oh muse number three. I hesitate to mention you here, I really do. You are too fresh. I hardly know you. But you've mentioned the singing in iambics. I need only pause briefly, here, and correct you.

endnotes

1. "The abyss in the middle (the balloon encircling the letter J—*jouissance*) is of course the whirlpool of enjoyment threatening to swallow us all, like the pond in Patricia Highsmith's story: the pothole exerting its fatal attraction. The three objects on the sides of the triangle are perhaps nothing but the three ways to maintain a kind of distance toward the traumatic central abyss" (Zizek *Looking Awry* 135).

2. "The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do" (Barthes *The Pleasure of the Text* 17).

   "The French have a distinguishing advantage which Roland Barthes, a Frenchman through and through, has taken, has used, has exploited in his new book about what we do when we enjoy a text; the French have a vocabulary of eroticism, an amorous discourse which smells neither of the laboratory nor of the sewer, which just—attentively, scrupulously—puts the facts. In English, we have either the course or the clinical, and by tradition our words for our pleasures, even for the intimate parts of out bodies where we take those pleasures, come awkwardly when they come at all. So that if we wish to speak of the kind of pleasure we take—the supreme pleasure, say, associated with sexuality at its most abrupt and ruthless pitch—we lack the terms acknowledged and allowed in polite French utterance; we lack *jouissance* and *jouir*, as Barthes uses them here. The nomenclature of active pleasure fails us" (Howard v).

3. "The sleeper is suddenly exposed to an irritation, a stimulus coming from reality (the ringing of an alarm clock, knocking on the door or, in this case, the smell of smoke), and to prolong his sleep he quickly, on the spot, constructs a dream: a little scene, a small story, which includes this irritating element. However, the external irritation soon becomes too strong and the subject is awakened" (Zizek *Sublime Object* 45).

4. "How else can one write but of those things which one doesn't know, or knows badly? It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say. We write only at the frontiers of our knowledge, at the border which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms the one into the other. Only in this manner are we resolved to write. To satisfy ignorance is to

put off writing until tomorrow—or, rather, to make it impossible" (Deleuze xxi).

5. "In the case of a present material object, there is no doubt as to the answer: order and coexistence come from an organ of sense, receiving the impression of an external object. This organ is constructed precisely with a view to allowing a plurality of simultaneous excitants to impress it in a certain order and in a certain way, by distributing themselves, all at one time, over selected portions of its surface. It is like an immense keyboard, on which the external object executes at once its harmony of a thousand notes, thus calling forth in a definite order, and at a single moment, a great multitude of elementary sensations corresponding to all the points of the sensory center are concerned" (Bergson 128).

6. "The pleasure of the text: like Bacon's simulator, it can say: *never apologize, never explain.* It never denies anything: 'I shall look away, that will henceforth be my sole negation'" (Barthes *The Pleasure of the Text* 3).

7. "*I-love-you* is not a sentence: it does not transmit a meaning, but fastens onto a limit situation: 'the one where the subject is suspended in a specular relation to the other.' It is a holophrase" (Barthes *A Lover's Discourse* 148). Barthes notes in the margin, here, a reference to Lacan.

8. "But how can the past, which, by hypothesis, has ceased to be, preserve itself? Have we not here a real contradiction? We reply that the question is just whether the past has ceased to exist or whether it has simply ceased to be useful. You define the present in an arbitrary manner as *that which is,* whereas the present is simply *what is being made.* Nothing is less than the present moment, if you understand by that the indivisible limit which divides the past from the future. When we think this present as going to be, it exists not yet; and when we think it as existing, it is already past. If, on the other hand, what you are considering is the concrete present such as it is actually lived by consciousness, we may say that this present consists, in large measure, in the immediate past. In the fraction of a second which covers the briefest possible perception of light, billions of vibrations have taken place, of which the first is separated from the last by an interval which is enormously divided. Your perception, however instantaneous,

consists then in an incalculable multitude of remembered elements; and in truth every perception is already memory. *Practically we perceive only the past,* the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future" (Bergson 149-50).

9. "What notion of narcissism can we form on the basis of our work? We regard narcissism as the central imaginary relation of interhuman relationships. What crystallized analytic experience around this notion? Above all, its ambiguity. It is in fact an erotic relationship—all erotic identification, all seizing of the other in an image in a relationship of erotic captivation, occurs by way of the narcissistic relation—and it is also the basis of aggressive tension... This is precisely where the mirror stage is useful... In every relationship with the other, even an erotic one, there is some echo of this relation of exclusion, *it's either him or me*, because, on the imaginary plane, the human subject is always in part foreign to him, a master implanted in him over and above his set tendencies, conduct, instincts, and drives. All I am doing here is putting into words, with a bit more rigor to bring out the paradox, the fact that the drives and the ego are in conflict and that there is a choice that has to be made. It adopts some, it doesn't adopt others, this is what is called the ego's function of synthesis—nobody knows why, given that on the contrary this synthesis never takes place and that one would do better to call it s function of mastery. And where is this master? Inside? Outside? He is always both inside and outside, which is why any purely imaginary equilibrium with the other always bears the mark of a fundamental instability" (Lacan 92-93).

10. "Itself an image, the body cannot store up images, since it forms a part of the images; and this is why it is a chimerical enterprise to seek to localize past or even present perceptions in the brain : they are not in it; it is the brain that is in them. But this special image which persists in the midst of the others, and which I call my body, constitutes at every moment, as we have said, a section of the universal becoming. It is then the *place of passage* of the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between the things which act upon me and the things upon which I act,-the seat, in a word, of the sensori-motor phenomena" (Bergson 151).

11. "It is like an event in my life; its essense is to bear a date, and, consequently, to be unable to

occur again" (Bergson 80).

12. "In other words, 'transference' names the vicious circle of belief: the reasons why we should believe are persuasive only to those who already believe" (Zizek *Sublime Object* 38).

13. "The question is: was the memory of a pain, when it began, really pain?" (Bergson 136)

14. "I couldn't wrap myself around this opening and begin. I was stalled for departure, for the simple reason that I could do nothing with so perfect a lead sentence but compromise it by carrying forward.... It felt so unsponsored, I could not have invented it" (Powers 25).

    "All I had to go on was that train. It might have come from anywhere, tracing a route so simple I would never win it back" (Powers 35).

15. "A real ellipsis cannot be perceived. According to the definition, after all, nothing is indicated in the story about the amount of fabula-time involved. If nothing is indicated, we cannot know what should have been indicated either. All we can do, sometimes, is logically deduce on the basis of certain information that something has been omitted. That which has been omitted—the contents of the ellipsis—need not be unimportant; on the contrary, the event about which nothing is said may have been so painful that it is precisely for that reason it is being elided. Or the event so difficult to put into words that it is preferable to maintain complete silence about it" (Bal 71).

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